

Daniel 5 - Study Guide

Handwriting on the Wall

Scripture Summary

As we get to chapter 5, approximately 23 years have passed. King Nebuchadnezzar has died and a number of monarchs have succeeded him albeit for only a short time. Nabonidus, Nebuchadnezzar's son-in-law has assumed the throne and he will be the last king of Babylon reigning from 556 B.C. until Babylon's fall in 539 B.C. However, Nabonidus is absent from the pages of scripture and his son Belshazzar is reigning over Babylon in his absence. Chapter 5 includes Belshazzar's mindset and the decisions he made, decisions which led to the demise of this world empire.

Basic Outline

1. The great feast (1-4)
2. The handwriting on the wall (5-9)
3. Daniel's reputation (10-12)
4. Daniel brought before Belshazzar (13-17)
5. The Word of the Lord spoken through Daniel (18-24)
6. The interpretation (25-29)
7. The fall of Babylon (30-31)

Something Helpful:

Cylinder of Nabonidus

This mid 6th century BC cuneiform cylinder was discovered in the temple of Shamash at Sippar (Iraq). It tells of Babylonian King Nabonidus' reconstruction of pagan temples and the discovery of ancient inscriptions of former kings. More importantly, however, it offers historical **confirmation of Belshazzar**, who was previously either considered legendary or the **Bible was mistaken to identify him as "king" (Daniel 5:1)** since he was absent from any official kings list.

- Confirms historical figure of **Belshazzar** (Daniel 5)
- Belshazzar was Nabonidus' son and **co-regent** (King, Daniel 5:1)
- Explains why Daniel could rise no higher than **3rd ruler** in the kingdom (Daniel 5:29)



Discussion Questions

1. What captured your attention most from Daniel chapter 5?
2. Belshazzar had the example from Nebuchadnezzar. He knew that “those who walk in pride, God is able to put down”, yet he ignored it. Why do people often fail, as Belshazzar did, to learn from the past? How can we avoid this pattern?
3. Daniel has been “on the shelf” for over 20 years. Demoted by Belshazzar as the chief of the wise men. From what we know about Daniel, what do you think was his mindset during this time? What was he doing to remain ready to be used by God again?
4. In verse 17, Daniel isn’t swayed by the gifts or the offer for promotion from Belshazzar. What does that say about the authenticity of this man and his message? How would you respond if you were in a similar situation?
5. What is the handwriting on the wall? At this point, is there room for any other interpretation? What does it mean for Babylon and Belshazzar?
6. What is the “writing on the wall” for everyone in our day?

Reference Verses:

Time is up

Jeremiah 27:6-7 And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given him to serve him. So all nations shall serve him and his son and his son’s son, until the time of his land comes; and then many nations and great kings shall make him serve them.

Jeremiah 51:56-57 Because the plunderer comes against her, against Babylon, and her mighty men are taken. Every one of their bows is broken; For the Lord is the God of recompense, He will surely repay. “And I will make drunk, her princes and wise men, Her governors, her deputies, and her mighty men. And they shall sleep a perpetual sleep and not awake,” says the King, Whose name is the Lord of hosts. Thus says the Lord of hosts: “The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire; the people will labor in vain, and the nations, because of the fire; and they shall be weary.”

Cyrus, an instrument of God

Isaiah 45:1-4 “Thus says the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held— To subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut: ‘I will go before you and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the Lord, who call you by your name, I Am the God of Israel. For Jacob My servant’s sake, and Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me.